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SPEECH OF
SEÑOR DON MATIAS ROMERO,

MEXICAN MINISTER AT WASHINGTON,

Read on the 65th Anniversary of the birth of

GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT,

CELEBRATED AT THE

Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church,

OF THE

CITY OF WASHINGTON,

ON THE 25TH OF APRIL, 1887,

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SEÑOR DON MATIAS ROMERO,
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READ ON THE 65TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF GENERAL
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CITY OF WASHINGTON, ON THE 27TH
OF APRIL, 1887.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : While I highly appreciate the distinction that the promoters of this celebration have conferred upon me in asking my assistance to honor the memory of one of the greatest men of the age by commemorating the sixty-fifth anniversary of his birthday, I deeply regret that I am not competent to do justice to the subject, especially because I have to express my views in a language which is not my own. I am also afraid that my estimate of Gen. Grant may be thought by some to be influenced by my personal regard and admiration for his character.

It would take much longer time than I can command should I attempt to make even a very brief sketch of Gen. Grant's life, which is, on the other hand, so familiar to you all, and more particularly to the congregation of this church, which was the place of divine worship of Gen. Grant during the eight years of his official residence at this capital as President of the United States.

It would be presumptuous on my part to attempt

even to speak of him in connection with his foreign policy, the subject which has been specially assigned to me, and I will therefore confine my remarks to his views about my own country, which I think I understood well, and some of my personal recollections of him, which perhaps are not generally known, and may therefore be of some interest to you.

I was during the fall of 1864 living in Washington, representing Mexico, and watching with great concern and solicitude the events of the mighty war which was then being waged in this broad country, and which constituted one of the severest trials that republican institution ever encountered, longing as a republican for the success of the Union, among other reasons because I was convinced that the intervention which the French emperor had brought over to Mexico, would come sooner to an end if the Union was restored in the United States, when the political events of Mexico induced one of the most prominent of Mexican statesmen, Gen. Doblado, to come to this country, and expressed to me his wishes to visit the Union army, which was then besieging Richmond and Petersburg under the command of Gen. Grant.

I most gladly availed myself of that opportunity to visit that army, and to make the personal acquaintance of its great leader. I had, of course, heard most of what had been said in favor of and against Gen. Grant by the newspapers, as I had resided almost uninterruptedly in Washington since December, 1859, long before the beginning of the war which made him so famous. He had then already won his most signal victories, and facts as eloquent as the victories of Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga were stubborn facts, which could not well be contradicted or doubted. Yet he was censured by some, and I had a great de-

rior to make the personal acquaintance of the war-sire who had attained such great victories, and who had resting upon him the great work of destroying slavery and saving republican institutions and free and popular government. I therefore made up my mind to accompany Gen. Doblado, who needed my assistance as he could not speak English.

I asked the necessary permit from Mr. Seward, then Secretary of State, who graciously gave us letters of introduction to Generals Grant and Meade and to Admiral Porter, and, on the 22d day of October, 1864, we left Washington for the James River, via Baltimore, and reached Gen. Grant's headquarters at City Point on the 24th. The General received us with great cordiality. He lodged us in a tent at his camp near his own, sent us to see the armies of the Potomac and of the James, under the respective commands of Generals Meade and Butler, and expressed to us the greatest sympathy for our cause, and even a desire to serve our government in its struggle to defend the independence and autonomy of Mexico, and thus preserve republican institutions in this continent against foreign aggressions.

I may remark here, in a passing way, that all the officers of the Union army with whom we came in contact, shared the opinion entertained then by the people of the Northern States, that the attempt to set up a monarchy in Mexico with foreign bayonets was a step intended to co-operate to the downfall of republican institutions on this continent, and was therefore an act unfriendly to the United States which this country could not ignore.

The extraordinary simplicity of Gen. Grant impressed me very forcibly. He occupied at that time at City Point a tent which I thought was no better than those of the private soldiers, and had a military overcoat as plain as those worn by the

common soldier. His demeanor evinced great simplicity, sincerity, and firmness of character, and he seemed to be greatly impressed with the responsibilities which rested upon him, although he had the firm belief that the war would end in favor of the cause he was defending. His wife and children accompanied him in his camp, and the solicitude that Mrs. Grant evinced for her husband was very remarkable. Subsequent acquaintance with that extraordinary lady has allowed me to appreciate all her worth, and I have the firm belief that Gen. Grant was indebted to his wife all through their wedded lives for a sound judgment, great attachment, and unselfish devotion. The willingness and promptitude with which Mrs. Grant parted with all she had to assist her husband in paying his debt of \$150,000 to Mr. William H. Vanderbilt, of New York, is a deed worthy of a Roman matron.

The cordiality with which Gen. Grant received me, and the great sympathy he showed for my country during the few days I had the pleasure to spend at his camp, made a lasting impression upon me, and were the beginning of a sincere and disinterested friendship, which was converted after his death into great admiration for his character. It would take much longer time than I could now spare, should I attempt to relate some of the many interesting incidents of our personal intercourse. I hope that it will be sufficient for my purpose to say now that our friendship sprang up from the fact that our views on the relations which ought to exist between Mexico and the United States were in perfect accord, and that fact and our relative position in our respective countries gave us the opportunity of making our friendship not subservient to any selfish or personal motive of either of us, but

to what we understood to be the best interest of our respective countries.

Gen. Grant went to Mexico, as you well know, as a second lieutenant of the army of invasion in 1846, first under Gen. Taylor by the frontier of Texas as far as Saltillo, and afterward under Gen. Scott by Vera Cruz up to the City of Mexico by way of Jalapa and Puebla, having visited Toluca, Cuernavaca, and Cuauthla Morelos. Of his views about that war he made no mystery and always held it as an unjust war brought about by the ruling class of a strong country against a distracted one, for the only purpose of increasing the area of slavery and to keep the control of the federal government in the hands of the slave power. His views on that war, as expressed in his personal memoirs, show that his strong sense of justice and rectitude could not be moved even by such great inducements as his personal interest as a member of the invading army, and the interest of his own country.

The remarkable powers of observation and the extraordinary good sense of Gen. Grant permitted him to understand Mexico after a stay of about two years in that country, as a member of the invading army, better than any born or trained American statesman ever did. To my knowledge, and I feel perfectly sure that as time rolls away, and as each country becomes better acquainted with the other, the Mexican policy forecast by Gen. Grant will prevail in this country, and that his views about the relations of the United States with Mexico will be adhered to, and regarded with as much respect as you hold now the farewell address of Washington.

Gen. Grant had a sensitive heart, which made him understand and appreciate the troubles and misfortunes of a high-spirited and chivalrous but

unfortunate people, with the resources and future for a magnificent country, and he always had the greatest sympathy and the kindest feelings for Mexico and the Mexicans. His later experience as a statesman and his foreign travels only served to confirm his early views about Mexico and his kind feelings towards the Mexicans.

I was very greatly surprised in my first conversation with Gen. Grant to find him so well informed about the condition of Mexico, the social and political status of its people and their needs, the causes which kept it backward, and the means to maintain peace and order and to turn a distracted into a prosperous and happy people.

After Gen. Grant returned from Mexico in 1848, he went with his regiment to California; and afterwards he resigned his commission in the army and entered into private pursuits; then came the civil war in this country, and his patriotic heart could not allow him to remain indifferent to the fate of his country. He offered his services to the governor of Illinois, and his career became a most eventful one from 1861 to 1864. He had, besides, when I saw him in October of that year, the greatest care and responsibility hanging upon him, and yet with all that, Mexico was the favored topic of his conversations with me, and his reminiscences of Mexico were as fresh and clear as if he had just returned from my country, and his views as thorough and correct as if he was a Mexican statesman. This fact shows conclusively, in my opinion, the great comprehensive power of his extraordinary mind, and that he really possessed the highest gifts of a statesman.

When the war was over, Gen. Grant established his headquarters in Washington as general in command of the United States army, and I then had frequent opportunities to see him, and talk with him

about the condition of Mexico, which, at that time, was very critical.

Public opinion was divided in this country as to the best course to be followed with a view to hasten the end of the French intervention in Mexico. While everybody thought that the intervention was intended on the part of the French emperor as a blow against republican institutions in the world, with a hope of subverting them, and that also he intended to thus assist the Confederate States in breaking up the Union, some, like Gen. Grant, thought that the United States ought to have resented this intervention as soon as the civil war was over, and to have sent an immediate notification to the French emperor that unless he should withdraw his troops from Mexico at once, the United States would assist the Mexican government in expelling them from the country, while others, like Mr. Seward, at the time Secretary of State, thought that the best way to accomplish the same end was to make that demand upon the French government in such a manner as not to wound the susceptibilities of the proud French people, which fact might perhaps delay instead of hasten the evacuation of Mexico by the French army.

As a straightforward man, and one who did not fancy any roundabout way of accomplishing an object, Gen. Grant felt very anxious on this subject, and did all he could, with the powerful influence and important position he held at the time, to carry out his views, sometimes sending to the frontier a large number of troops under Gen. Sheridan, without instructions from the President, as a demonstration to the French emperor, and at other times urging the President of the United States to adopt a more decisive policy than the one pursued by the Secretary of State. Enjoying the confidence of President Johnson, however, Mr. Seward succeeded

in having his policy adopted by the administration ; and the French intervention in Mexico finally came to an end, although not so soon as Gen. Grant desired, but sooner than it would have come if the United States had not lent us at the time their good offices. Perhaps it was the best thing that could happen for Mexico and the United States that the evacuation of Mexico by the French should have taken place without bringing about any act of hostility between this country and France. As it was, I consider it as the greatest blow that the emperor of France had received up to that time ; and I think that I could show plainly that the original cause of his downfall was the mistake he made in trying to set up an empire in Mexico, and the way in which he had to retrace his steps and to abandon to his fate the scion of an imperial house who had trusted him. Very few could imagine at the time that the attempt of the French ruler to subvert the constitution of an American republic should bring about the result before the end of many years, of making him lose his throne, and restoring republican institutions in France.

The interest that Gen. Grant felt in Mexico, and his desire to put as soon as possible an end to the French intervention, was so great that he often expressed to me his wish to go at the head of an army of the United States to assist the Mexican government in driving out the invaders, and this was especially remarkable because, as everybody knows, though he was a great warrior, and very likely the greatest of this century, he utterly disliked war.

After Gen. Grant had taken his tour around the world, which gave him an opportunity that very few men, if any, ever had before, of visiting every important country upon the face of the earth, and to understand, with his wonderful powers of observation, their condition, needs and probable future,

and having personal intercourse with the most distinguished statesmen, leading men and rulers in each country, whether in Europe, Asia or America, he naturally had his views, as a statesman, about the position, policy, and future of his own country, very much enlarged, for I hold that there is nothing which expands so much one's mind and allows him to obtain clearer knowledge of this kind than intelligent traveling in foreign countries. It was then that he matured his views about the condition of China and Japan, and the policy that the United States ought to follow toward these eastern empires, a policy which I think will have to be in the future adhered to by this country as a legacy left to her by one of her greatest men.

He thought then that his work could not be at an end if he did not visit Mexico again. To be sure, he knew Mexico perfectly well and did not need a second visit to know all about it, but his love for my country was so great that he thought he ought not to fail to see it once more. Early in 1880, he went there again, accompanied by Mrs. Grant and his eldest son, and had the opportunity of seeing the changes which had been accomplished to the credit of Mexico, notwithstanding all her misfortunes brought about by civil and foreign wars, in the nearly quarter of a century which had elapsed since his first visit. It was then that he matured his views about the best way for Mexico to develop her own resources and to become a great nation, as well as to the policy that the United States ought to pursue toward Mexico. He saw at once, with his great foresight, that the material resources of Mexico could not be developed in large scale except by the construction of railroads, which would really be extensions of the railway system of the United States into a country capable of producing in large quantities all the tropical fruits needed in the

United States and of consuming from this country a proportionate amount of American manufactures.

While Gen. Grant was in Mexico he had conversations with the leading men of the country on this subject, which led to a request on their part for him to submit the condition of things to capitalists in the United States, with a view that they might make investments in the building of railroads in Mexico. On his return to this country he spoke earnestly on the subject, and the expression of his views contributed largely to the organization of several companies in the United States for the purpose of building important lines of railroad in Mexico, although he had no personal interest of any kind in them. I refer especially to the Mexican Central and the Mexican National railways, running respectively from El Paso and from Laredo, Texas, to the City of Mexico. When the building of this line seemed to be an assured fact, he thought that American enterprise ought not to stop at the City of Mexico, but go on toward Central America, as in that direction lies one of the richest portions of Mexico, and he understood clearly the fact, which is not yet admitted generally, but which I have no doubt will be recognized before long, that the "iron belt" will before very long encircle the whole American continent. With this object in view, he organized in New York a company for the purpose of building a railroad from the City of Mexico toward the frontier of Mexico and Guatemala, with branches to the Gulf of Mexico and to the Pacific, and he went himself to Mexico for the purpose of making the necessary arrangements with the Mexican government. This road was not built because a panic took place about that time in this country which made capital timid; but I have no doubt it will be one of the first trunk lines built in Mexico. The connection of Gen. Grant with the Mexican South-

ern road gave his detractors an opportunity to censure him, though he was trying to carry out a lawful enterprise, which would have been a good investment for capitalists, and a great advantage to Mexico. Knowing of the transaction which took place at the time, as I was in New York when Gen. Grant organized the company, and I accompanied him to Mexico, I am perfectly satisfied that while he desired, of course, to protect the capital invested in that road and to make it a profitable investment, his living motive in that enterprise was by no means selfish, but a national one, so far as his own country was concerned, and a benevolent one, so far as Mexico was concerned. I myself have been criticised in connection with that scheme with Gen. Grant, and with the purpose of explaining the General's views on this subject rather than defend myself, I beg to be allowed to say that no thought ever crossed my mind that was not honorable and just to Gen. Grant. Had I any desire to avail myself of his kindness and good will toward me, I would have tried to do so while he was the respected and powerful head of this government; but during the eight years he filled the office of President of the United States I never was in this country, and I neither think nor remember of having written him a single letter.

My own connection, besides, with this road was a very clean one. The federal government of Mexico had given a grant to the governor of the state of Oaxaca in 1880, for the purpose of building a road from the City of Mexico to the capital of that state, with branches to the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific, allowing a subsidy of about seven thousand dollars per kilometer. The governor of the state of Oaxaca gave me full power to transfer this grant to any company that I thought was likely to build the road, and I did transfer it to the company organ-

ized in New York by Gen. Grant, without charging one cent commission for the disposal of the valuable property. I, besides, held no lands or any other values which might be enhanced by the building of this road. Nobody was ruined in this country, so far as I know, by that operation. The amount of money spent was by no means a large one, and the greater portion of it was used in buying a large tract on the Gulf of Mexico, where lies what is supposed to be the only good harbor on the Mexican coast of that gulf.

The two visits which Gen. Grant made to Mexico in 1880 and 1881 developed and confirmed his views about the future of my country and the political and commercial relations that the United States ought to establish with Mexico.

It was about that time that Congress authorized the President of the United States to send a commission to Mexico for the purpose of negotiating a commercial treaty; and Gen. Grant being the man for the place, was at once selected for that position by President Arthur, and his Secretary of State, Mr. Frelinghuysen. Having myself been authorized by the Mexican government to meet Gen. Grant for such purpose, I had the honor, as well as the pleasure, to be associated with him in a work which I believe has a national character; and it was a model of fairness, because it did not give either country an undue advantage over the other; its intent being to develop a large trade between the two nations for the mutual advantage of both. This treaty evoked the opposition of several parties, some of whom went so far as to assert that in signing it we had a personal purpose to subserve, which was one of the most unfounded as well as unjust assertions ever made. The moment Gen. Grant heard of such accusations, he addressed a letter to a newspaper of this city, which had given currency

to such rumor, denying it in the most emphatic terms, and saying what was a fact, that he never had business connection of any character whatsoever with me.

As I remarked before, I have no doubt that, notwithstanding the opposition which this treaty encountered, the views and principles embraced in it will be hereafter accepted by this country as the soundest that can control its relations with Mexico. The least thing that could be said about this is that Gen. Grant was, on this subject, several years in advance of his generation.

Nothing better illustrates the character of Gen. Grant, and his respect for justice and peace, than his management of the difficulties with England after the civil war was ended here, and during the early years of his first presidential term. The United States felt very much aggrieved with England after the civil war for assistance which they thought she had rendered to their enemies during that war, and a war with England would certainly have been a popular measure at that time, of which a demagogue might have availed himself for objects of personal aggrandizement. A warrior like Gen. Grant might have been influenced in that regard by the wish of carrying out a gigantic war between two of the most powerful nations on the earth, and the hope of achieving similar victories to those which he had already won; but, like a great statesman and a true patriot, he preferred to the doubtful and terrible destinies of war, the honorable and peaceable means of arbitration, and, for the first time in the history of the world, I believe, a great general, probably the leading soldier of his age, agreed to end by peaceful means the difference with a rival country, giving up, therefore, all idea of personal fame through another war.

Not to detain you any longer, I will now come to

the last moments of Gen. Grant on his dying bed. I went as often as I could to see him, to New York and to Mount McGregor during the last months of his life, and was glad to remain by his bedside two or three days at a time, and I did so especially whenever I learned that his terrible sickness was coming to a crisis. On the 4th of July, 1885, I arrived at Mount McGregor and found that the General could not talk any longer, but said in writing what he wished, and in this way we were permitted to keep his last thoughts. I took his pad and wrote this question: "They tell me, general, that you have not pain any longer." He answered on the same pad and below my question as follows: "There were a few days when I had but little pain and had but little cocaine. Now I have to use it, at times, as often as once a half hour to allay acute pain in my mouth. It does not affect it whatever; only lessens it." He added: You may talk to me. ' In the course of my conversation he wrote on his pad about his terrible sufferings as follows: "I have been a very great sufferer since I saw you last. Generally I get very good rest from 11 at night until about noon next day, but not always. Thursday night I neither slept nor was free from pain at any time. Saturday was much the same. Last night I slept and rested well from about 12 to 7 this morning. I see now a bad day before me."

In a letter which he had written to me from New York, on the 16th of February, 1885, he spoke about his sufferings and his sickness, as follows:

"I have been a great sufferer since we met last, and continue to be yet, though I feel now that I am at last improving. You may remember that when you were at Long Branch last summer, I was complaining of a sore throat. I thought nothing of it at the time, and did not consult a physician about it until about a month after my return to the city.

It had then run without care, some four months. When the doctor was seen he decided that my sore throat resulted from my stomach being nicotinized. I have given up smoking entirely for the last three months, and feel that I am now about free of nicotine, though not of its effect."

As his grandchild Ulysses S. Grant, a son of Col. Grant, about 5 years old, came that morning of the 4th of July, 1885, to bid him good morning, he wrote: "Happy boy, he does not seem to realize my condition. The little girl does, however," meaning his sister, Julia Grant, who was at the time about ten years old.

His good will toward Mexico was so great that, notwithstanding his intense suffering, and without my mentioning anything to him about it, he wrote to me as follows: "I have been intending to write President Diaz a long personal letter, embracing political matters relating to the two countries. There is a stagnation in business in this country which affects Europe as well as Mexico. Nothing is so abundant here as money; nothing is so cheap or so hard to get except by those who do not want it. Confidence will be restored here, I trust, before many months. If it is, it will be followed up abroad as well as at home."

Only four days after that, on the 8th of July, 1885, some Mexican journalists who had come to visit this country, visited him at Mount McGregor, and he wrote to them the following expression of his views and sympathy toward Mexico.

"My great interest in Mexico has dated back to the war between the United States and that country. My interest was increased when four European monarchies attempted to set up their institutions on this continent, selecting Mexico, a territory adjoining us. It was an outrage on human rights for a foreign nation to attempt to transfer her institu-

tions and her rulers to the territory of a civilized people without their consent. They were fearfully punished for their crime.

“I hope Mexico may now begin an upward and prosperous departure. She has the elements of success. She has the people, she has the soil, she has the climate, and she has the minerals. The conquest of Mexico will not be an easy task in the future.”

This great man, so liberally endowed by nature, with the gifts of a strong mind, a sensitive heart, a most remarkable good sense and a pure character, can be certainly taken as a model for the future generations of this country, and his great services to his country will make his birthday in future ages as sacred for his fellow citizens as Washington's birthday is at present.

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